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ABSTRACT

Findings from a case-method study that explored educational administration students' perceptions of two administrative theories--micropolitical analysis and traditional social systems approach--are presented in this paper. Methodology involved presentation of a case to educational administration students who participated in group discussion and analysis using the two contrasting administrative theories. Follow-up questionnaires exploring perceptions of the theories' usefulness were administered to the students (N=17; N=16). Findings indicate that theory can be validated through hermeneutic analysis and practical use. The recommendation is made to apply adult learning techniques to the evaluation of administrative coursework and to make administrative instruction part of the hermeneutic circle. The appendix contains the questionnaires. (48 references) (LMI)

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A CASE METHOD EXPERIMENT: COMPARISONS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MICROPOLITICAL ANALYSIS VS. OTHER THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ADMINISTRATION

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A CASE METHOD EXPERIMENT: COMPARISONS OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF MICROPOLITICAL ANALYSIS VS. OTHER THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ADMINISTRATION

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OBJECTIVES:

Concerns about the integrity of administrative theory are part of the impetus and debate about school reform and organizing and leading school restructuring (Culbertson, 1988; Griffiths, 1988; Griffiths, Stout & Forsyth, 1988; Jacobson & Conway, 1990; Murphy & Hallinger, 1987; Thomson, 1989). The practitioner's perceptions of the veracity of administrative theory is a resounding concern (Crowson & McPherson, 1987; Jacobson, 1990; National Policy Board, 1989; Thomson, 1989).

This researcher and others believe that for professional practice, empirical grounding is necessary, but not sufficient, for the development of theory in administration (Garman, 1990). As an added criteria, administrative theory must be perceived as viable and useful to practitioners (Schön, 1990).

The purpose of this research was to test the veracity of two administrative theories offered to educational administration students through the case method. This experiment was conducted over one term in an effort to ascertain students' perceptions of the usefulness of the emerging work in micropolitical analysis versus the more traditional administrative theory of the social systems approach. Students were asked to apply these theories to

a single case and then reflect on the ease, usefulness, and effectiveness of the applications of each of the theories.

PERSPECTIVES & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Although two administrative theories were the subject of this research, the underlying framework for conducting this study involved the intellectual traditions of grounded theory as well as the principles of adult learning. The intellectual traditions provided the rationale for the study. Adult learning principles guided the development of an instrument to generate student evaluations of the various experiences they had with the case method and the theories.

The intellectual traditions associated with theory development, over the last several decades, have focused on empirical validation of theories of administration through the "scientific method" or logical positivism (Crowson & McPherson, 1987; Kneller, 1984). Emerging approaches to validation of administrative theory have focused on more interpretive constructions of the "real work" of schools and administrators (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Crowson & McPherson, 1987; Everhart, 1988, 1989). The rationale for this study is that how a student constructs his or her understanding of the problems presented through cases or practice will have a direct effect on the veracity and usefulness of the applicable theories of practice (Schön, 1990). This rationale follows a long tradition of educational studies using a hermeneutic framework (Garman, 1990; Kneller, 1984; Everhart, 1989).

Adult learning principles provide some insights for the development and reform of administrative coursework (Bredeson, 1988; Levine, 1989; Lindle, 1990). Adult learning principles emphasize a more holistic approach to information delivery and understanding (Knowles, 1982). These principles have been tested with some administrative courses (Levine, Barth & Haskins, 1987; Lindle, 1990).

Proponents of adult learning approaches find their roots in John Dewey's work on experiential learning (Bredeson, 1988). Dewey promoted experiential learning as a method for integrating subject matter in a more holistic approach to teaching and learning. Rather than fragmented, context free content, Dewey suggested the inclusion of real world experiences for expanding and learning the traditional curriculum (Dewey, 1974). The students who built a house at Dewey's progressive school in Chicago are a standard example of experiential learning. Adult learning principles shift the focus of instruction from professor-determined criteria to more student-oriented conditions.

Malcolm Knowles (1980) is generally cited in reference to adult learning principles. He has listed four assumptions about the characteristics of adults as learners. These characteristics include (1) an exhibition of a more mature self-concept which is independent rather than dependent, (2) a possession of a reservoir of experiences which can be drawn upon in learning situations, (3) an orientation in their learning to tasks which fit their social roles, and (4) a requirement that learning produce immediate

benefits and applications (Knowles, 1980, pp.44-45).

Conti's (1985) work extended the assumptions delineated by Knowles. Conti furnished guidelines for instructors who wish to meet the characteristics of adult learners. According to Conti, the instructional techniques for adult learning include (1) learner-centered activities, (2) personalized instruction, (3) relevancy to the adults' experiences, (4) assessment of student needs, (5) climate building, (6) participation in the learning process, and (7) flexibility for personal development (Conti, 1985, pp.9-10).

For this study, adult learning principles were used as the conceptual framework for the development of an evaluation instrument for students to indicate their experiences with the case method and applications of various administrative theories. The questions which were generated checked for understanding of the case and of the presented theory as relevant to the world of the adult student. Questions also assessed students' needs in terms of the future use of both the theory and the case study.

METHODS & TECHNIQUES:

Procedures

The case method.

A single case was presented to students which incorporated a number of social, political, and managerial issues in a "typical" American high school. The case "Robert F. Kennedy High School" (Gabarro, 1974) comes from a body of cases developed at the Harvard Business School. Although the case was developed in the mid-

1970's, the issues readily identifiable in the narrative of the case and the "Teaching Notes" (Gabarro, 1979, 1985), represent rather classic organizational, intergroup, and personal conflicts found in large comprehensive high schools. This case also has the advantage of depicting larger social issues such as school security and interracial relations in the context of an educational setting. The issues are complex and realistic, based as it is in the facts of an actual high school in the mid-west (Gabarro, 1979, 1985; Gragg, 1940; Immegart, 1967).

Students in an educational administration course in one term used this same case over several class periods. For the purposes of this study, students were asked to use two contrasting administrative theories, Getzel's and Guba's Social Systems Theory (Getzels, 1958; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Getzels, Lipham & Campbell, 1968) and the emerging micropolitical construction of organizational relationships (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987; Hoyle, 1986; Blase, 1986, 1988, 1989; Lindle, 1989, 1990).

Students discussed the case in small groups and reported the group's analysis of the case using the "theory of the day." In this study Getzel's and Guba's model (1957, 1958, 1963) was presented one day. The micropolitical model (Lindle, 1989, 1990) was presented the next.

The competing administrative theories.

The presentations of these models were accomplished through direct instruction. Students were given a summary of the theory and a synthesis of some of the theory and research involving the

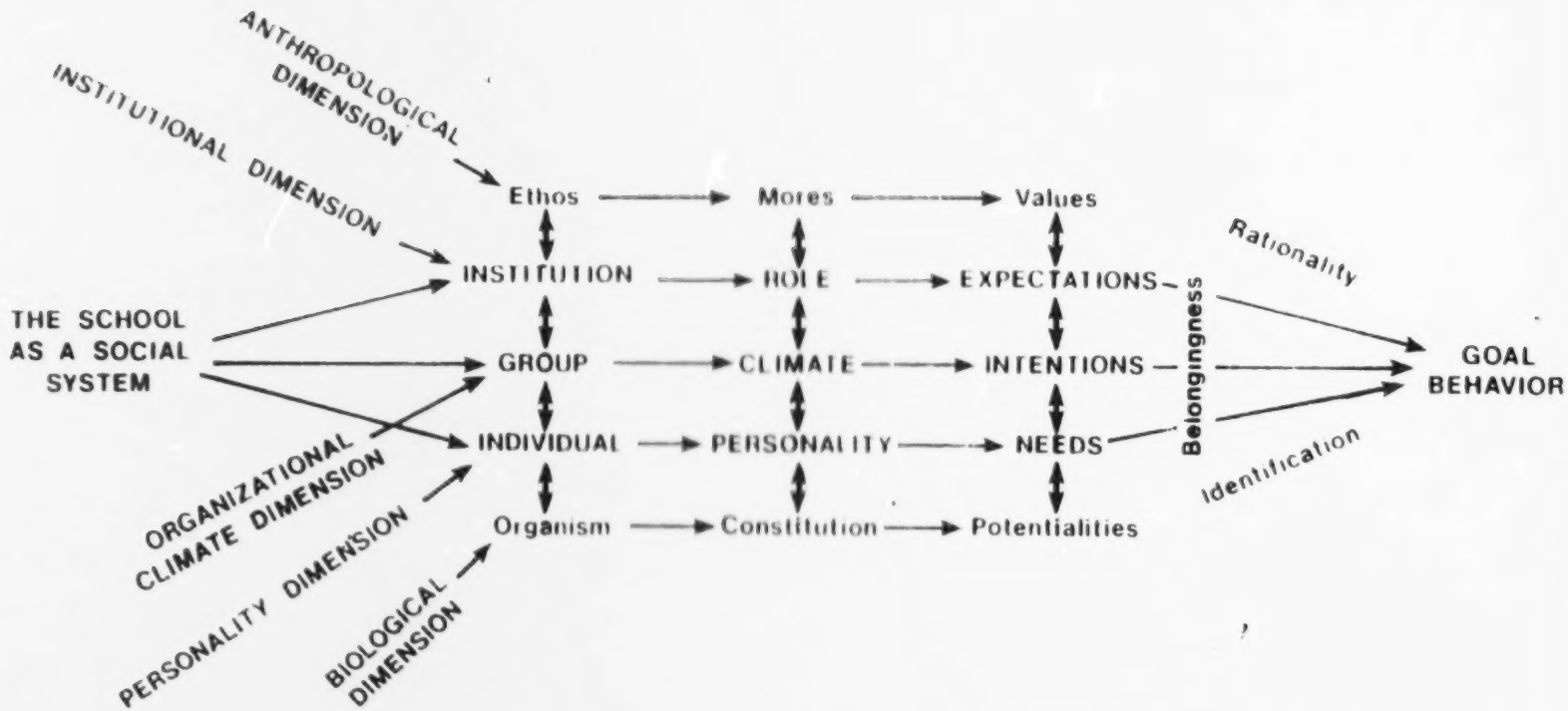
model.

Social Systems Theory

Getzel's and Guba's model (1957, 1958, 1963) is commonly referred to as Social Systems Theory. This is a model which dominated most programs of educational administration in the U.S. and Great Britain throughout most of the 1960's and 1970's (Ball, 1987; Campbell, Fleming, Newell & Bennion, 1987; Hoyle, 1986). Social systems theory originated in the work of Talcott Parsons, a sociologist, and an anthropologist (Parsons, 1951; Getzels, 1957).

Social Systems Theory presents a model of organizational interactions and conflict between the individual and the institution. Getzels and Guba named the institutional dimension nomothetic and dubbed the individual dimension, ideographic. The model experienced several iterations as Getzels collaborated with others in various organizational studies (Campbell, Fleming, Newell, & Bennion, 1987; Culbertson, 1988). The most complex version of this model offers an acknowledgement of environmental influences on the organization (Campbell, Fleming, Newell & Bennion, 1987; Hoy & Miskel, 1987). The graphic depiction of the elements of the augmented Social Systems Theory was mirthfully and variously labelled the "hydrogen bomb," the "Hindenberg," or the "Goodyear Blimp" by various generations of educational administration students (Lipham, 1981). Figure 1 depicts the Social Systems Model.

The expanded version of the Social Systems Model, shown in Figure 1, illustrates the multidimensional forces affecting



Dimensions of the school as a social system. Adapted from Jacob W. Getzels and Herbert A. Thelen, "The Classroom Group as a Unique Social System," in *The Dynamics of Instructional Groups: Sociopsychological Aspects of Teaching and Learning*, ed. Nelson B. Henry. N.S.S.E. Yearbook LIX, Part II (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1960), p. 80.

individual, group, and organizational behavior. Each horizontal sequence represents a different dimension. Besides the original individual and institutional dimensions, there are dimensions for the cultural environment, the organizational climate, and a biological dimension (Owens, 1987). Each behavioral act is simultaneously triggered along these dimensions. The vertical arrows represent the synergy of these dimensional forces upon each other and the resultant behavior. The synergy of these dimensions represent the interactions and conflicts found in the organization (Getzels, Lipham, & Campbell, 1968). Conflict is also a dominant theme in the Micropolitical Model.

Micropolitics

The instructor synthesized the emerging literature and research on micropolitics to instruct students on the micropolitical perspective on organizational environments. Obviously, a more detailed analysis cannot be presented here. The elements of micropolitics as presented to the students can be summarized only briefly here.

The work on the micropolitical context of schools has been virtually avoided in the coursework of educational administration (Layton, 1989; Englert, 1989). Much of the work on the micropolitics of schools has arisen from studies of the relationships between headmasters and teachers in schools in Great Britain (Ball, 1987; Hoyle, 1986). Despite the reference to political science embedded in the term 'micropolitics', these researchers are primarily identified as sociologists and students

of organizational studies, not as specialists in the politics of education (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Townsend, 1990). The U.S. contributions to the work on school-based politics are found primarily in the work of Joseph J. Blase (1988, 1989, 1990).

Both Ball (1987) and Hoyle (1986) have attempted to synthesize their own studies into models of micropolitical activities in schools. Both contrast their models with the more traditional bureaucratic paradigms of organizational theory. Both are particularly at odds with the dominance of systems theory as a popular means of understanding organizations. Hoyle (1986) goes to great lengths to contrast Getzels and Guba's model with his micropolitical understanding of organizations. Ball (1987) simply indicts all systems theory as ineffective validation of authority in the bureaucratic sense. Ball is adamant that the bureaucratic perspective cannot accommodate a micropolitical perspective and vice versa (1987). In contrast, Hoyle explains that bureaucratic behavior can also be political behavior (1986). Hoyle does not elaborate on the conditions under which these behaviors converge, but for the purposes of instruction and of this research, a conceptual model was generated. [See Figure 2]

FIGURE 2
CONTINUUM OF MICROPOLITICAL
ORGANIZATIONAL COMPONENTS

COMPONENTS	COVERT CONFLICT <----------> OVERT CONFLICT	
Organizational Structure	Tightly coupled <------>	Loosely coupled
Power Source	Authority <---------->	Influence
Accommodation to Group Mores	Group orientation <----->	Self orientation
Points of Strategic Deployment	Goals <---------->	Interests
Interest Sets	Departments <---------->	Coalitions
Organizational Activities	Procedures <---------->	Strategies

Figure 2 depicts the conditions under which political behavior is more or less apparent. When conflict is more covert, a more traditional, bureaucratic structure appears. The more traditional concepts of the components of organizational theory are in place. The right hand side of the chart represents the political behavior which is often associated with conflict. The arrows represent the fluid nature of these political behaviors. By moving along these continua, a political behavior can change from overt conflict to more covert conflict activities in any given component of the organization.

The source of power is a component which is crucial to the micropolitical perspective. Ball (1987) and Hoyle (1986) explain

that the power of influence is more potent in schools than the power of authority. Schools appear disorderly and irrational to a bureaucrat because the bureaucrat relies on authority to drive organizational behavior. Conflict becomes overt because authority is insufficient to accomplish organizational goals. A bureaucrat finds overt conflict dysfunctional (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987). Bureaucrats attempt to control conflict through motivation and consensus which are political strategies themselves.

Researchers who take a micropolitical perspective find conflict a natural commodity associated with people in groups (Ball, 1987; Hoyle, 1986). Political approaches to organizations are often faulted for promoting dissonance through political acts instead of harmony through collaboration because of the emphasis on conflict (Townsend, 1990). In a micropolitical approach, harmony and collaboration are themselves a form of political behavior. Political behavior emanates from any individual. These researchers have currently focused on the behaviors of principals and of teachers.

Blase (1988, 1989, 1990) has developed a list of political strategies employed by teachers with principals who have different styles of management. Teachers tend to be compliant and somewhat subversive with closed, ineffective principals (Blase, 1990). With open principals, teachers still employ a variety of strategies to reach their own goals (Blase, 1989). Such goals may be organizational (for the school or for the students) or these goals may be more teacher oriented (for my classroom, for my career, for

myself). This range of goals also may be found among educational administrators.

Ball (1986) presents a list of leader behaviors which range from authoritarian to what he terms adversarial, but he actually defines 'adversarial' as a pluralistic approach to leadership. Ball also describes the ways that leaders encourage and control participation or stifle opposition.

The details of political behavior in schools are so familiar to students, that the discussion of particular strategies for working with teachers or principals is often quite lively. Students often do not need a detailed list of political behaviors to move into the case study. Frequently a simple contrast of the political behaviors of organizational or group goals and individual interests along the "Points of Strategic Deployment" continua is sufficient for students to understand the paradigm of micropolitics. For this research, students moved rather quickly to the case study after a short discussion of the components of micropolitics.

Instrumentation.

Following the use of the case study with each of the competing theories, a questionnaire was distributed. The first questionnaire consisted of eight Likert scaled questions and two open-ended questions. The eight questions incorporated the principles of adult learning in checking for students' understanding of the presented theory and their view of the veracity and relevance of both the theory and the case presented. [See Appendix A].

These ten questions were repeated on the second questionnaire along with two more Likert scaled questions comparing the competing frameworks and four open ended questions referring to the students' preferences. [See Appendix A].

At the end of the course, students were asked to synthesize their reactions to the theories presented in classes and explain their own conceptual and practical approaches to educational problems through a case analysis. The case analyses were content analyzed for their relation to the theories presented in the class.

RESULTS:

Seventeen students completed the first questionnaire and 16 completed the second questionnaire. The majority of these students were elementary or secondary administrators. One was a minister. One was the coordinator of a missionary order. One was from a ministry of education in a developing nation, and three were teachers in elementary or secondary schools.

Students found the case study realistic and useful. Sixteen out of 17 indicated they 'Strongly Agreed' or 'Agreed' the case study was realistic.

Thirteen students 'Strongly Agreed' or 'Agreed' that the micropolitical approach helped identify the sources of conflict. Eleven students picked these responses in reference to the Social Systems Theory, and six students at least "Sometimes Disagreed" that the Social Systems theory made identifying sources of conflict easy.

After these initially positive responses, most of the students indicated on the four questions, which dealt with the usefulness of either theory for actually solving problems, that they weren't really sure how to solve the conflicts in the case given the theoretical models. Students also were not decisive about how useful either approach would be in their professional lives. They also reported that they were not sure that the Social Systems Approach was "an organized way to solve problems." In contrast, the students were universally agreeable that the micropolitical approach was "an organized way to solve problems."

Students faulted both models for not offering prescriptions for solving problems. Some felt the Social Systems Model was too complex. Others felt the Social Systems Model offered order for complex situations. Some felt the micropolitical model was useful for showing the shifts in power and values, but others felt that it could not show the shifts since politics are "too unpredictable."

In comparing the models students split evenly on their preferences for either model. Students favored the Social Systems Model for its multi-dimensionality. Students also found that the micropolitical model provided a larger picture of the complex issues to be found in conflicts in an organization.

Several students complained that one day was not enough to absorb and apply any theory immediately. A few were concerned that they might be wrong in selecting either approach for a solution to any given problem.

In their final papers, only one of the students used the

Social Systems Theory in their case analysis. The rest of the students engaged in micropolitical analysis in some form. Several students applied a highly bureaucratic approach to solve the problems presented for their final paper. This choice of approach may have had something to do with the individual students' personal styles. Those who used a bureaucratic approach had identified themselves on a conflict style inventory as primarily confrontational in their tactics for handling conflict. Unfortunately, the conflict style inventory was not considered as relevant data in the design of this study, so the data was not retained for analysis with the other data sources in this study.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

There were a number of limitations to this study. Due to the lack of a sampling plan, the findings are not generalizable. Nevertheless, the methods are replicable and the results have some important implications for a number of aspects of educational reform in my own classroom and in others.

In the hermeneutic sense, the student's interpretations of the theory learning experience have been shared with me. Although I controlled the conditions and the media for those communications, these controls help me interpret the results (Grumet, 1990; Phillips, 1990).

Students' concerns about the theories may be more related to instructional issues such as clarity of presentation of the theories and the allotted time for learning the theories. These

instructional adjustments are easily made in order to replicate the study.

Another instructional adjustment may pertain to the use of the case method. Students who worried about being wrong faced a classic concern with their adaptation to the use of the case method approach (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1990; Gragg, 1940). More instructional time may be necessary to alert students to the ambiguity of the case method approach as well as to the relationship between the ambiguity of life and work problems to the indefinite answers of the case method.

Implicit in students' use of a micropolitical approach in their final papers is an endorsement of the micropolitical perspective as a natural theory in operation (Schön, 1990). Social Systems Theory may have appealed to students' sense of the educational aesthetics of the classroom. Several indicated they liked the multi-dimensionality of the Social Systems Model; yet, students appeared to have found the micropolitical approach less cumbersome to apply to a "real" problem in the stress of writing their final paper.

This study provides a rationale for increasing the criteria of the development of theory. The added criteria include validation of the theory through analysis and use by practitioners. The rational for this added criteria is found in hermeneutics, a tradition in educational studies which contrasts with the former bases for administrative theory, such as the scientific or the logical positivistic approach.

Another useful result of this study is further application of adult learning techniques in the analysis and evaluation of administrative coursework. Adult learning principles were found to be a useful framework for soliciting student evaluations of coursework.

For this instructor, the teaching of theory will continue with more comprehensive data sources for understanding the students' interpretations of the experiences. Next time, I do this study, I will include more student-generated data from other class activities, such as the results of the conflict style inventory.

In the final analysis, reflective instructors are necessary for the development of reflective practitioners. The quality of the experiences in educational administration classrooms must be monitored and must be rigorously adjusted to exert a positive influence on educational administrative practice. If rigor is not a criteria of instructional practice, then rigor in theory of administration is a moot issue. For there will be no interpretation of theory to practice, no matter how well theory interprets practice, if the classrooms for administrators are not a part of the hermeneutic circle.

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Appendix A
Questionnaires

Social Systems Analysis Questionnaire

You have just completed analyzing a case study of organizational conflict using the Social Systems approach to organizational analysis. This questionnaire is designed to gather your opinions on the usefulness of the Social Systems Approach. There are no right or wrong answers since these questions are designed to stimulate your opinions. Please answer as honestly as possible. No names are necessary for completing this questionnaire.

Circle the letters which represent your opinion. Your choices are

SA= Strongly Agree A= Agree A/D= Sometimes Agree/Sometimes Disagree D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree

EXAMPLE

It is hard to find parking at Pitt.

SA A A/D D SD

1. The case study I just completed analyzing was realistic.

SA A A/D D SD

2. The Social Systems Approach made it very easy to identify the sources of conflict in this case study.

SA A A/D D SD

3. The conflicts in this case study were not very realistic.

SA A A/D D SD

4. Using the Social Systems Approach, I could see which strategies could bring a resolution to the conflicts in this case study.

SA A A/D D SD

5. The Social Systems Approach made solving the problems in this case study very straight forward.

SA A A/D D SD

6. I would use the Social Systems Approach as a resource for solving conflicts in my job in the future.

SA A A/D D SD

7. I think the Social Systems Approach will help me solve most of the conflicts I face in my professional life.

SA A A/D D SD

8. The Social Systems Approach is an organized way to approach solving conflicts.

SA A A/D D SD

9. I felt the best part of using this approach for this case study was . . . [use the back of this page if necessary]

10. I didn't like using this approach because . . . [use the back of this page if necessary]

Micropolitical Analysis Questionnaire

You have just completed analyzing a case study of organizational conflict using the Micropolitical approach to organizational analysis. This questionnaire is designed to gather your opinions on the usefulness of the Micropolitical Approach. There are no right or wrong answers since these questions are designed to stimulate your opinions. Please answer as honestly as possible. No names are necessary for completing this questionnaire.

Circle the letters which represent your opinion. Your choices are

SA= Strongly Agree A= Agree A/D= Sometimes Agree/Sometimes Disagree D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree

EXAMPLE

It is hard to find parking at Pitt.

SA A A/D D SD

1. The case study I just completed analyzing was realistic.

SA A A/D D SD

2. The Micropolitical Approach made it very easy to identify the sources of conflict in this case study.

SA A A/D D SD

3. The conflicts in this case study were not very realistic.

SA A A/D D SD

4. Using the Micropolitical Approach, I could see which strategies could bring a resolution to the conflicts in this case study.

SA A A/D D SD

5. The Micropolitical Approach made solving the problems in this case study very straight forward.

SA A A/D D SD

6. I would use the Micropolitical Approach as a resource for solving conflicts in my job in the future.

SA A A/D D SD

7. I think the Micropolitical Approach will help me solve most of the conflicts I face in my professional life.

SA A A/D D SD

8. The Micropolitical Approach is an organized way to approach solving conflicts.

SA A A/D D SD

9. I felt the best part of using this approach for this case study was . . . [use the back of this page if necessary]

10. I didn't like using this approach because . . . [use the back of this page if necessary]

11. The Micropolitical Approach is not as useful as the Social Systems Approach.

SA A A/D D SD

12. I think the Micropolitical Approach and the Social Systems Approach are both practical for analyzing conflict in organizations.

SA A A/D D SD

13. I personally prefer ...[name an approach to conflict analysis you find useful] ...

14. The most important reason to know about the Social Systems Approach in conflict analysis is ...

15. The most important reason to know about the Micropolitical Approach in conflict analysis is ...

16. Comments?